



TRACING ANCESTRY IN ANGLICAN & NON-CONFORMIST CHURCH RECORDS OF WALES

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Wales anciently was comprised of over 400 parishes. By 1812, there were about 469 parishes total in the Anglican Church. By mid-19th century, however, Non-conformity spread throughout Wales. It began in the early 18th century, with numbers steadily increasing. By 1851, nearly 70% of the population attended Non-conformist chapels. Non-conformists go to a “chapel”. Anglicans attend “church.” Many Welsh church records are written in the Welsh language prior to 1790. As a result, you may need a Welsh dictionary. The FHL has a Welsh language dictionary *Y geiriadur mawr: The Complete Welsh-English English-Welsh Dictionary* by H. Meurig Evans and W. O. Thomas (Llandysul, Wales : Christopher Davies, 1958 (1981-1987)), FHL Book# 491.66321 Ev15y. Google Translate (<http://translate.google.com>) may also help.

What is “The Established Church”?

A. The Church of England (Episcopal or Anglican or ‘state church’) – in Wales

Beliefs are:

- Utilize the office of the “Bishop” over a diocese, administering in ordinances
- Is Catholic in its forms, but with slightly less rituals
- Pope: Anglicans do not adhere or accept that The Bishop of “Rome” – has jurisdiction over the whole world, nor that his word is binding. Rather, only the Bishop of the local diocese has authority to administer in ordinances & disseminating messages of importance for those within its local jurisdiction

What is a “Non-Conformist”?

A member of any Protestant church outside of the (Established) Church of Wales (the Church of England in Wales). Those that separated themselves from communion within the Church of England—all such were known also as “Dissenters” or a dissenter.

Under-scoring reasons Non-conformity Grew in Wales

1. English Protestant dissenters from various Non-conformist groups dating from late 16th to the early 19th centuries, sought either a change in their personal religious affiliation—and/or—to affect change or reform in the Church of England’s ceremonial practices such as the use of church ornaments, vicarious intercession by priests during the eucharis, musical instruments, and in many cases Episcopal (bishop’s) authority which they considered unscriptural according their views on Biblical (New Testament) standards and practices.

2. After the printing of the Bible, street corners, many home hearths, and church pulpits of churches caught 'fire' and invoked a pervasive and catastrophic spiritual revolution which swept through most of Europe, and easily ignited in England and Wales as well.
3. Many in the Church of Wales sought to change or reform Established Church of England.
4. Questioned Episcopal authority.
5. Majority populated (recommencement of) seats of Parliament during England's Civil War 1642-1660.
6. Protected England's constitution, and Magna Charta; tried/be-headed a "tyrant" King-- Charles I; civil war which disrupted record-keeping in most churches up until 1660.
7. Thousands—Royalists and Non-conformists (incl. Puritans)—fled England

Doctrinal Similarities

A connective thread of doctrinal similarities existed throughout numerous of Wales' Non-conformist religions, including:

- Calvinistic (Methodist) Church or better known as Presbyterians
- Methodists
- Primitive Methodists
- Baptist
- Huguenots
- Congregationalists/Independents
- Quakers

The population of Non-conformists according to the 1851 Census was 20% to 30% in England and 68% in Wales.

Historical events affecting Non-conformity in Wales (& England)

1531 – King Henry VIII declares himself supreme head of the Catholic Church in England, is excommunicated, commencing the official establishment of the (Protestant) Church of England thereafter

1538 – Gwaenysgor, Breconshire parish records began: 1 each in 1538, 1541, 1559. Mostly from 17th C. however

1563 – Catholics can't run for govt offices, fined for non-attendance at Church of Wales services

1551-1588 – Bible translated into Welsh

1565 – French crown initiates measures of brutality, forcing many Protestants to flee the country for their lives for England, Ireland, and other countries

1597 – A call for annual Bts) copies of CMBs

1598 – PRs on parchment; prior PRs copied

1606 – Catholic CMBs were to be recorded in CoW; Catholics refused except in cases of burials

1633-1639 – 1st NC chapels at Llanvaches, Monm., & Baptist chapel at Olchon nr borders

1642-1660 – Civil War and Interregnum briefly created a 'Protestant Republic'; however, afterward, Non-Conformists persecuted again by King Charles II

1650-1680's – Quakers persecuted; flee to North America colonies of PA and RI, other places

1650-1700 – Wales' literacy is boosted dramatically with the aid of several teaching societies, and by several published books of general interest. Greater literacy swells the ranks of Welsh Non-conformity which continued all the way up into especially the 20th century

1661 – 'Clarendon Code': 5 Mile act & Conventicles (no meetings of 5 or more people!)

1689 – Toleration Act: non-attendance in Church of England services – ok'd

1695-1705 – Marriage Duty Act: the "non-baptized" in parishes, recorded in the PRs

1735 – Wesleyan Methodists began with founders John and brother Charles Wesley

1738 – Welsh Calvinistic Methodists began giving rise to Presbyterianism throughout land

1754 -1837 – All marriages to be in Church of Wales with the exception of Quakers and Jews.

1778 – Catholics felt safer to keep records

1791 – More than 100,000 Wesleyan Methodists

1795 – Many Non-conformist registers survive from about this time

1837 – All Non-conformist marriages no longer required in Church of Wales parish churches

1851 – 68% of Welsh people are Non-conformists

1870's – over 75% Non-conformity

Recognizing Non-conformist Ancestry

1. Children: Biblical given-names i.e. Elijah, Rebecca, Ezekiel, Miriam, Isaac, Ruth, Daniel, Charity, Joseph, Benjamin etc.
2. If a parish register records a marriage or burial – but not the person's nor his/her siblings' christenings)
3. Post-1837 marriage certificate shows a marriage performed by the local superintendent registrar instead of the local vicar of the Church of England
4. When tax, occupation, probate records or directories, etc. show residence, but no commensurate appearance of a surname in Church of England parish registers
5. Marriage performed "by license" (for the sake of privacy)
6. Family records or traditions suggest
7. A Civil Registration Marriage certificate indicates a couple was married in a Non-conformist chapel & denomination
8. When the Church of England parish registers show any disproportionate number of marriages and burials over christenings
9. Rights of primogeniture: sometimes one child—usually the first-born only—in a family may be christened in the Church of Wales
10. The lack of a University Education in a profession in which it might be expected

How Non-conformist Churches and Chapels were Named

- Not (usually) designated by the parish name
- Identified by name of denomination & name of township where located or name of local congregation or a patron saint (Roman Catholics)
- Usually established/built well outside a parish township but within the civil or ancient parish boundaries. [Note: Parish boundaries often incorporated several smaller villages and towns]
- Circuits (Methodists); Union Assembly (Baptist)

- The use of land to build a chapel or the leaving of land for that purpose in a will. 1736-1870 over 35,000 deeds for British Isles (includes schools, burial grounds, and charities)
- The 1851 Religious Census lists what Chapels existed at that time, see The religious census of 1851: a calendar of the returns relating to Wales, FHL Book 942.9 B4b no. 30, 31, FHL fiche 6054483-4
- Chapel histories name many of the congregations

Lord Hardwick's Marriage Act

Lord Hardwick's marriage act required Non-conformist marriages to be performed in Church of Wales parishes from 1754 to 1837. These marriages occurred in only bride or grooms parish, or, in the nearest market town. Chapelries were seldom granted 'license' to perform marriages – always see the records of the ancient parish.

Value of Church of Wales Registers in Non-conformist Research

- Prior to 1852, most Non-conformists burials in Church of Wales churchyards
- Just about all marriages were performed in Church of Wales Parish buildings
- An occasional baptism might appear in the Church of Wales registers
- Methodists: most appear in Church of Wales parish registers from 1740's up to 1805, later
- Early Puritans appear in some Church of Wales registers

Main Non-conformist Denominations (with year they began)

- Baptist – 1644
- With "sub" denominations: General Baptist/Unitarian Baptist, General Baptist New Connexion, Particular Baptist, Anabaptist, 'Separatists' – a movement that started in the Church of England
- Bible Christian – 1815
- The Brethren/Plymouth Brethren/Christian Brethren/Darbyites - 1828
- Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion – 1783
- Independent/Congregationalists – 1592
- LDS (Mormon) – 1830
- Methodist New Connexion - 1797
- Presbyterian - 1571
- Society of Friends (Quakers) - 1646
- Swedenborgian/New Church/New Jerusalemites – 1783
- United Brethren/Moravian - 1742
- Wesleyan/Primitive Methodist – 1740's

Where to Find Key Websites for Wales Church Registers

1. FindMyPast.co.uk (www.findmypast.co.uk) has the world's largest Wales parish registers database online—with images; works cooperatively with FamilySearch to index these registers (digitised by FamilySearch in 2010) though they don't appear to be fully indexed.
2. BMDRegister.co.uk (www.bmdregister.co.uk) (\$) - Has some entries of Non-conformists throughout Wales – and is continually growing!!

3. FreeReg.org.uk (www.freereg.org.uk) has many Wales parish register transcriptions/indexes online.
4. “Google”-ing: page-down “results” to a Wales parish (Gwaenysgor).
5. FamilySearch.org has large database registry offerings for Wales, i.e. contains most of Dr. William’s Library (1742-1837) ~50,000, most of the Wesleyan Methodist Metropolitan Registry (1818-1838) ~ has about 10,000 entries

Other Ways of Finding Records

- **Family History Library:** Family History Library Catalog (FHL) - “Church Records” and do a “place” search at the parish level and county level. Do the same for surrounding parishes and the nearest market town. Also try a search of the entire country.
- *National Index of Parish Registers* (NIPR), vol. 2 by Don J. Steel (FHL Book# 942 D27ste)
- Explore the Internet (e.g. www.google.co.uk)
- Go to England
- Look at holdings of county record offices
- Look-up exchanges
- Local Family History Societies
- Religious Historical Societies
- National Repositories
- Databases at www.genuki.org.uk

Remember

- Not every Non-conformist congregation kept complete records
- Check time period for records kept - may not cover your time period

Other Helps

- County Directories
- Gazetteers (www.visionofbritain.org.uk)
- Maps & Histories
- 1851 religious census

Society of Friends

Search:

1. Transcript of the Digest Copies of the register of births, marriages and burials
2. Quarterly Meeting registers
3. Monthly Meeting registers
4. Yearly obituaries—The Annual Monitor